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Richard M. Hoffmann

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SOME PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF MORTIFICATION

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ALL the classic works of the supernatural life devote great attention to the practice of mortification. The great writers in the field of Ascetical Theology assure us that without mortification there can be no true striving after supernatural perfection. This study has been undertaken with the idea of determining the place of mortification in the life of virtue as proposed by St. Thomas. We wish to determine the precise function of mortification in the life of virtue. Once we have determined this fundamental point we hope to find therein the solution to three other problems that arise from the doctrine of the writers on asceticism concerning mortification. These problems are: 1. Will the inflicting of pain lessen the desire for pleasures of the flesh? 2. Is not mortification psychologically dangerous? 3. Will mortification strengthen man's will for future combat?

This question of mortification, however, we will treat neither as a theological problem nor as a study in Ethics. Rather, we will treat the various acts of mortification from a psychological standpoint. We are to treat the acts of mortification, not as measured according to a moral norm, but as they are in themselves. We are to consider these operations in themselves, their very make-up, constitution, and mechanism. We are to probe the inter-dependence of the various human cognitive and appetitive faculties and to study the acts of mortification as contributing to the harmony and smooth functioning of the human personality or as destructive of this harmony and equilibrium. We aim to determine the psychological function of mortification in the development of virtues. The point of determining the psychological function of mortification is this: to

see if mortification, psychologically speaking, is capable of attaining the purpose traditionally assigned to it by the great masters of asceticism.

Regarding terminology, we will use mortification as a very general term signifying any kind of restraint and moderation in human activity. The other terms, control, denial, abnegation, and self-discipline are merely more concrete and determinate particularizations of this general term.

Our treatment is divided into four parts:

- I. Psychological problems involved in the practice of mortification.
- II. Mortification, a requisite in developing intellectual and moral virtues.
- III. Mortification as a means of developing temperance.
- IV. Proposed solutions to the psychological problems of mortification.

I. PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEMS INVOLVED IN THE PRACTICE OF MORTIFICATION.

The theologian, with St. Thomas, sees man with his two-fold nature, sensible and intellectual, and the consequent danger of the preponderance of the sensible over the spiritual.¹ This tendency of the sensible nature to predominate over the spiritual is deepened and intensified by man's personal sins. It is the role of mortification to eradicate in man the bad habits contracted by a life of sin.

But its task goes still further. Not content with allaying in man all disordered movements of his nature, mortification combats his lower nature by acts contrary to its yearnings. The purpose of these acts is to keep the lower nature under

¹ "Non enim angelus est compositus ex diversis naturis, ut inclinatio unius naturae impetum alterius impedit aut retardet; sicut in homine accidit, in quo motus intellectivae partis aut retardatur aut impeditur ex inclinatione partis sensitivae." (*Summa Theol.*, I, q. 62, a. 6).

perfect control. Mortification causes man to refrain from the use of that which pleases, even when that use would not be a hindrance to the love of God in the soul. The precise purpose of this renunciation is to prepare man for future combats wherein the practice of virtue will prove a real difficulty.²

Mortification demands the renunciation of the enjoyment of lawful goods. This renunciation strengthens dominion over pride and concupiscence. It prohibits and limits the enjoyment of certain goods and requires the deliberate choice of certain bodily pains such as that inflicted by means of the cilicium and discipline. This limiting of enjoyment and positive choice of austerities is meant to interrupt normal comfort and physical well-being to free the spiritual person from his weakness toward his body and its instincts. The thoroughly legitimate use of certain good things is renounced for the sake of purification or liberation. By mortification the spiritual person is set free from the life of instincts and acquires a mastery over the entire domain of concupiscence.

These are formidable tasks assigned to mortification: keeping man away from sinful pleasures, overcoming the wounds left by personal sin and gaining mastery over the violent movements of his sense nature. Because of the nature of these tasks, acts of virtues appear not less formidable. The authors of the classic works on the spiritual life recommend the discipline several times a week and the wearing of a chain around some part of the body. The body is to be kept in perpetual restraint. St. John of the Cross demands of his followers a deep spirit of mortification. They should reject the delight they might experience by looks, by conversation with their neighbor or through any other of their senses. If they must of necessity use things which are agreeable to the senses, they ought to avoid taking pleasure in them. They should

² "Die Abtötung verzichtet auch dann, wenn der Gebrauch in einzelnen jetzt und hier kein Hindernis der Gottesliebe wäre, um sich einzuuben auf schwierige Lagen, wo wirklick die Tugend auf dem Spiele stehen würde." Bernhard Häring, *Das Gesetz Christi*, I Buch, VI Kap. pg. 533, Freiburg im Breisgau, 1954, Wewel.

rather strive to extinguish and blot out the impression made by the pleasure as if they had not experienced it at all. They ought always to tend toward things that are hardest, least tasteful, most disagreeable, and which cause them affliction.³

According to the writers of ascetical theology, mortification connotes a deliberate suppressing of a good, normal and reasonable desire to speak and communicate with others. It entails a constant giving-up of good, pleasing and even noble things for which human nature craves. It demands a constant, ceaseless surveillance of every conscious act, a holding in of the faculties when they are clamouring to spring into action. It is a calculated war against the external senses of touch and taste and hearing and sight, an even more determined checking of the imagination and memory, a constant demand upon the will to choose that which is hard and even difficult to do.

With this description of mortification in mind we may well ask the following questions.

1. *Will the inflicting of pain lessen the urge for sexual pleasure?*

Will the inflicting of pain by means of the discipline and the cilicium lessen and subdue the cravings of the flesh for sexual delights? Is it not a fact that some of those who have tried to subdue and repress the promptings of their sexual desires by flagellations and fastings have experienced even greater difficulty than before their voluntary maceration of the flesh?

2. *Is not mortification psychologically dangerous?*

Is it not probable that this war against one's natural instincts, longings and desires will destroy the correct balance of an individual? Will it not hinder the smooth and harmonious functioning of his personality? Will it not leave a man drained of all the vast, rich power of his personality?

³ San Juan de la Cruz, *Subida del Monte Carmelo*, Liber I, Chapter XII, Obras Vol. II, pg. 60, 61.

3. *Does mortification strengthen man's will for future combats?*

Will the fact that a person represses his longing for a satisfaction of one kind strengthen him to deny urgings of another kind? Will a man who denies himself daily in eating and drinking and represses an intense desire to speak strengthen himself thereby to overcome temptations of the flesh?

II. MORTIFICATION, A REQUISITE IN DEVELOPING INTELLECTUAL AND MORAL VIRTUES.

A. Mortification—*The Virtue of Temperance Taken in a General Sense.*

In several passages of the *Summa Theologica* St. Thomas speaks of the cardinal virtues taken in a very general sense as signifying a necessary condition and prerequisite for the attaining of any moral virtue. He explains that we can consider the cardinal virtues according to their common formal aspects. In this respect they are said to be common to all the virtues. Every virtue which causes good in reason's act of consideration can be called prudence; every virtue which causes a rightness in operation can be called justice. Similarly every virtue which curbs the passions may be called temperance and every virtue which strengthens the mind against any passion whatever may be called fortitude.⁴ In another passage prudence is described as discretion in any matter whatsoever; justice, as a certain rectitude of the mind whereby a man does what he ought in any matter. Temperance is described as a disposition of the mind moderating any passion or operation so as to keep them within bounds; and fortitude, as a disposition by which the soul is strengthened against any assault of the passions and against the labor involved in operations of any kind.⁵

Applying this doctrine more specifically to the notion of temperance we see that the virtue of temperance in this wide signification governs the whole realm of human emotions and

⁴ *Summa Theol.*, I-II, q. 61, a. 3.

⁵ *Summa Theol.*, I-II, q. 61, a. 4.

actions. As a general virtue it is a disposition of soul which imposes moderation upon the operations and upon the urgings of the passions.⁶ Temperance, as a general virtue, is an element found in each of the moral virtues. It is the element of control over human passions and activities. Each act of a moral virtue signifies a certain control over the soul's activity. No moral virtue can be acquired without this control. The task of justice is to see that man renders to everyone his due. This can be done only at the price of controlling selfish interest and motives. Fortitude strengthens the soul against fears that paralyze virtuous action. Temperance, as a special virtue, controls pleasures which are excessively alluring, governing the use of food, drink and the sexual function. These virtues presuppose a firm control over the passions and the soul's operations. This control is the temperateness, the moderation which St. Thomas calls the general virtue of temperance.

Temperance as a general virtue is the denial or control exercised as a necessary prerequisite for the attaining of any moral virtue. In the ascetical life, mortification would seem from the definitions given of it to be not only temperance as a general virtue, but also an intensification of this general virtue. Writers, in treating of the supernatural life, usually employ the word mortification to signify the more difficult intense and arduous acts of the general virtue of temperance. To understand the place of these acts of denial and repression in human striving we must inquire into the psychology of habit formation.

B. *Mortification—Necessary for Developing Operative Habits.*

An operative habit is a disposition, difficult to remove, according to which a potency or a faculty is disposed well or badly in relation to an act. It is a steady disposition of a faculty of the soul by which the faculty's indeterminateness in regard to its several possible ways of acting is given a

⁶ Nomen temperantiae significat quandam temperiem, idest moderationem quam ratio ponit in humanis operationibus et passionibus. II-II, q. 141, a. 2.

dynamic, teleological ordination to a certain act. By it the faculty is given a certain operative unification of its multiple potentialties. A habit modifies a man, gives a definite channel along which his almost limitless powers will flow. It is an accidental form perfecting and determining the faculty.

Operative habits can be developed only in those faculties which are not determined to one thing. Therefore they are found in the intellect and in the will, in the imagination, memory and cogitative power as serving the intellect in its operation, and in the sensitive appetite as possessing an inborn aptitude to be moved by the rational appetite, the will.

Except for the habit of first principles, all of our operative habits, whether they reside in the intellect or in the will or in those powers of our sensitive part which are susceptible of habits, are the result of conscious, deliberate, repeated effort.

In the formation of an operative habit almost all of our human cognitive and appetitive faculties are involved in some way, either positively or negatively. Each one of these faculties has its own proper object toward which it tends by its very nature. Each one of these faculties has a natural appetite for its object. Each one of man's faculties or powers is a certain nature. Each has an active inclination to act according to that nature, to attain the proper object to which it is transcendently ordered. This innate inclination of a form toward the object to which it is ordered St. Thomas calls a natural appetite.⁷

Man possesses a two-fold nature. This nature is composed of both spiritual and corporeal elements. The powers of both these natures meet in the soul and therefore the human soul abounds in a variety of powers.⁸ The vegetative powers, reproductive, augmentative and nutritive, give the body existence,

⁷ *Appetitus naturalis est inclinatio cuiuslibet rei in aliquid ex natura sua: unde naturali appetitu quaelibet potentia desiderat sibi conveniens.* I, q. 78, a. 1, ad 3um.

⁸ *Est et alia ratio quare anima humana abundat diversitate potentiarum: videlicet quia est in confinio spiritualium et corporalium creaturarum et ideo concurrunt in ipsa virtutes utrarumque creaturarum.* I, q. 77, a. 2.

enable it to acquire due quantity and preserve it in existence and in its due quantity.

In common with brute animality man possesses sensitive powers of motion, knowledge and appetite. For sense knowledge man is endowed with five external senses each limited to its own particular object. Since each external sense is thus limited to its particular object, some common center of sense perception is necessary to distinguish between the various external senses and between their various objects. This common center of sense perception is the internal sense called *sensus communis*.

The other three internal senses further elaborate the material received from the external senses through the *sensus communis*. The imagination has as its task to receive and to retain that which comes to us through the external sense. Its specific act is to represent objects previously sensed in their absence and without the limitations of time and space. The imagination in man can also reconstruct new objects from the elements which it has already received. The cogitative power has the highest function among the internal senses. Its task is to apprehend the individual as existing *sub natura communi*. It formulates particular syllogisms and provides the minor of a practical syllogism. It prepares the phantasm received from the imagination for the working of the intellect. Memory in man has as its task not only the sudden recollection of the past as in other animals, but also, because it works in conjunction with the cogitative power, it has the act of reminiscence by which it quasi-syllogistically seeks for a recollection of the past by the application of individual intentions.⁹

The sense appetite in man follows upon the apprehension of sense knowledge. The concupiscent appetite tends toward sensible goods simply as being suitable to the sensitive nature. The irascible appetite tends toward goods under the special aspect of their being attainable only with difficulty.

⁹ I, q. 78, a. 4.

Man's intellect is a spiritual faculty which knows the essences of things, formulates universal concepts, judges and reasons. The will is the appetite following upon the knowledge of the intellect.

Each human faculty then has its own proper object toward which it tends. Yet all of these human faculties, vegetative, sensitive, motor and spiritual are informed by one spiritual soul. The human soul is the source and origin of unity in the human composite, a substantial as well as a dynamic unity. Because all of man's faculties are informed by the same human soul, they are inextricably interlocked and interwoven with one another in their activity. In their operations they depend on one another, influence one another and hinder or help one another. The activity of the one affects the activity of the other.

Because our various faculties are so closely related and intertwined in their operations, if one particular faculty is developed and trained and cultivated in a special manner, the other faculties will be affected. They will, as a natural consequence, be made to serve and to minister to the particular faculty which is being given the preferential treatment. When the operation of one potency becomes intense the operation of another potency is hindered and the intense action of this one potency leaves its effect by way of redundancy upon the other.¹⁰ The reason one power is hindered in its act when another is intensely engaged is this, that one power alone does not suffice for such an intense action unless it be assisted by receiving from the principle of life the inflow that the other powers or members should receive.¹¹

In their acts, man's various powers mutually influence one another. The same holds for the development of an operative habit which is formed by a succession of acts. In the development of an operative habit, the will must exercise its power as

¹⁰ . . . quod cum operatio unius potentiae fuerit intensa, impeditur alterius operatio et e contra fit redundantia ab una potentia in aliam.

¹¹ IV Sent. 44, 2, 1, q. 3, 4um.

governor of the whole man. It must exercise its authority to take care that the executive and sensitive faculties are rendered habitually subservient to the operations of the intellect and will.

C. *Mortification—and the Intellectual Habits of Science.*

Developing intellectual habits presents difficulties to man. Nature gives man a foundation for intellectual habits in the perfection of the senses. Those who by nature possess well-disposed sense organs of knowledge are better able to understand than others, because the sensitive powers are necessary for the operation of the intellect. Keen sense organs are a decidedly good start toward intellectual habits. Yet, though nature gives a foundation for these habits, they must, nevertheless, be developed by repeated acts.

Of the three other speculative habits or virtues assigned to the intellect the one with which we are concerned primarily is science, the virtue which deals with truth known through demonstration. The truth it seeks is that which can be deduced from first principles or gathered from facts in the light of first principles furnished by the virtue of understanding. It comprises what we would call knowledge. The acquiring of knowledge is a difficult, somewhat painful process. All of man's cognitive faculties are involved in this process.

The intellect in acquiring knowledge is dependent upon the senses. Success in learning then demands control over the sensitive cognitive faculties. The sight and hearing must be made to concentrate on the matter at hand. It is especially from these two senses that the imagination, via the *sensus communis*, receives the material for its phantasms. Without an habitual control over these two external sense faculties, the internal senses will be constantly distracted and unable to serve the intellect in acquiring knowledge. The imagination, together with the cogitative power and memory, must elaborate the phantasm, the material of which it has received from the external senses. These three internal senses prepare the phantasm for the

intellect. These internal senses are susceptive of habits because they are possessed of a certain indetermination and can be moved at the command of reason. They must be controlled, must be brought to obey the will in producing the phantasm of the matter one wishes to master. Other phantasms will present themselves to distract the intellect's attention. Constant care is required to keep the proper phantasm presented to the intellect so that this spiritual faculty can concentrate solely on this particular bit of knowledge at hand. Because the intellect is so dependent upon the internal senses both in acquiring new knowledge and in recalling things already learned, these three internal senses must be made to serve the intellect, must be made to present the intellect with the proper phantasms. They must be made to reject other phantasms that come forth and threaten to dispel the one the intellect is using. The will, as possessing power over these faculties can acquire a rather strict domination over them by repeated victories. Its control is never absolute. Even the limited control it attains must be continually guarded and kept up. The imagination, the memory and the cogitative power tend by their nature to their own objects. They are part of the equipment of our sensitive nature. The internal senses, if left to follow their own inclination, will not present the intellect with the phantasms it needs to conserve and increase its knowledge. Thus the intellectual habits of scientific knowledge are weakened. Our knowledge, laboriously acquired, disappears. This process St. Thomas describes in speaking of the diminution of habits. He states that all habits which are gradually undermined by contrary agents are diminished or destroyed altogether by long cessation from act as is clearly seen in the case both of virtue and science. Thus when man ceases to make use of his intellectual habits, strange imaginings or fancies which at times are in opposition to these intellectual habits arise in the imagination. Unless a man check these fantasies or imaginings by frequent use of his intellectual habits, he becomes less apt to make correct judgments and sometimes is completely disposed

to the contrary. Thus the intellectual habit is diminished or even wholly destroyed by cessation from act.¹²

The formation of the intellectual habits of knowledge, therefore, presupposes that the sense faculties, particularly the internal sense faculties, be checked and controlled in their operations and that their operations be made to serve the operation of the intellect.

D. *Mortification and the Moral Habits of Prudence, Justice, and Fortitude.*

Though the intellectual virtues demand as a condition a certain subjection of the sense faculties to reason, yet they are imperfect virtues. They perfect a man in a particular line of activity. They can make a man a good mathematician or a good architect without influencing his conduct in other fields. Developing perfect virtues, i. e., those habits which make the whole man good, presents a greater problem and difficulty for man. These perfect virtues which make the whole man good belong to the will, or if found in another faculty, it is in that faculty insofar as it is moved by the will.

Prudence perfects the whole man. Though residing in the intellect, it is in a very real sense a moral virtue because it deals with human acts. Its proper task is to enable a man to reason well with regard to right conduct as a whole. Prudence is wisdom about human affairs. The proper end of each moral virtue consists precisely in conformity with right reason. It belongs to the ruling of prudence to decide in what manner and by what means a man can in a concrete action attain that mean of right reason. It applies to action the first principles of the practical order. It is the virtue that gets things done

¹² Similiter etiam est ex parte habitum intellectualium, secundum quod est homo promptus ad recte judicandum de imaginatis. Cum igitur homo cessat ab usu intellectualis habitus insurgunt imaginationes extraneae, et quandoque ad contrarium ducentes: ita quod nisi per frequentem usum intellectualis habitus quodammodo succidantur, vel comprimantur, redditur homo minus aptus ad recte judicandum et quandoque totaliter disponitur ad contrarium. Et sic per cessationem ab actu diminuitur vel etiam corrumpitur intellectualis habitus. I-II, q. 53, a. 3.

the way they should be done. Its perfection consists in excellence of command. Its principal act, therefore, is one of command whereby a man applies the knowledge he has to the purpose of appetition and operation.

Such a habit is not easy to acquire. Its task is to apply universal knowledge to particulars. It, therefore, presupposes some knowledge. It uses knowledge already attained and by its three acts of judgment, counsel, and command it applies this knowledge to some particular act to be placed here and now. St. Thomas states that prudence is corrupted by the passions.¹³ He gives an explanation of this in another part of the *Summa*, showing how reason has four acts in matters of actions. The first presupposed, to prudence, is the simple understanding which grasps some end as good. The passions, by engaging the attention of the internal senses, influence the intellect's work of understanding and tend to hinder the formation of a habit of knowledge and to diminish it if already acquired. The vices are habits by which the passions have acquired mastery over the will. Thus the passions, especially through the vice of lust, hinder the act of understanding. The three acts of prudence, judgment, counsel, and command, are also hindered by lust. Counsel about what is to be done for the attaining of an end is hindered by the concupiscence of lust and in this respect there is rashness, which denotes an absence of counsel. Judgment about things to be done is also hampered by lust and the result is thoughtlessness. The reason's command about the thing to be done is likewise impeded by lust in this, that a man, carried away by concupiscence, is hindered from doing what his reason ordered to be done.¹⁴

Justice can be practiced only by controlling selfish interests and motives. It is not difficult to see that for a man to be perfectly fair and just in each of his dealings with every one of his fellow men presupposes and demands a strong control.

¹³ Prudentia non directe tollitur per oblivionem sed magis corrumpitur per passiones. II-II, q. 47, a. 16.

¹⁴ II-II, q. 153, a. 5.

But it is particularly in regard to the virtues of fortitude and temperance that we see the need of strong control and denial.

It is the task of fortitude to guard the will against being withdrawn from the good of reason through the fear of bodily evil. Fortitude as a cardinal virtue has as its assigned role the governing of the irascible appetite. The irascible appetite is the sense appetite that tends toward sensible goods under the aspect of the good as difficult to attain. A consideration of the difficulties involved in the attainment of this virtue illuminates the doctrine on the dual nature of man and the consequent need or mortification in striving for virtue.

In speaking of the angels, St. Thomas says that the angel is not a combination or compound of different natures so that the inclination of one part hinders or retards the tendency of the other as in man in whom the intellective part is hindered over his natural desire to possess and to use material goods, and retarded by the inclination of his sensitive part.¹⁵ Speaking of the relation of these two natures to each other in man he explains that the powers of the sensitive part, save for the vegetative powers, are born to obey reason's command.¹⁶ But this power of the will over the movements of the sense appetite is not a complete, absolute power. The soul rules the members of the body by a despotic power because the members of the body cannot in any way resist the rule of the soul. But reason rules the concupiscent and irascible appetite by a political power. This means that the sensitive appetite has something proper to itself whence it resists the commands of reason. The concupiscent and irascible powers resist reason insofar as we sense or imagine something pleasant which reason forbids or something unpleasant which reason commands.¹⁷ In developing

¹⁵ I, q. 62, a. 6.

¹⁶ Et ideo voluntas per modum agentis movet omnes animae potentias ad suos actus, praeter vires naturales vegetativae partis, quae nostro arbitrio non subduntur. I, q. 82, a. 4.

¹⁷ Sic igitur anima dominatur corpori despoticó principatu quia corporis membra in nullo resistere possunt imperio animae. . . . Intellectus autem, seu ratio dicitur principari irascibili et concupiscibili politico principatu; quia appetitus sensibilis

the habit of fortitude the will's task is clear. It must strengthen and tighten its control over the movements of the sense appetite.

Fortitude strengthens the reason to control the passions of the irascible appetite. These passions, following upon sense knowledge and following their own natural bent, incline the soul to flee from every bodily harm, especially death. Fortitude guards the will against being withdrawn from the good of reason through the urgings of these passions, through the fear of bodily evil. The will must override the promptings of the sense appetite which shrinks from bodily harm, when reason sees this bodily harm should be suffered for some greater good.

Habitual control by the will over all the movements of the irascible appetite demands as a postulate previous strong acts of the will, restraining, directing and controlling the movements of this appetite. Each one of these single acts which begets the virtue means a concomitant act of denial. It means that the will has intervened in the natural movement of the sense appetite toward an object convenient to it. It has allowed the movement of the sense appetite toward a convenient object to proceed only to a certain point, and then has restrained and curtailed this movement so that its functioning would not hinder but would rather assist the will's movement toward another good it has chosen. Should reason see that it can only effect this indirectly by removing the phantasm which has caused the passion to arise, a complete removal of the passion is necessary. The virtue of fortitude, therefore, is acquired by repeated acts of denial, acts by which reason curtails the movements of sense or turns these movements to serve its own chosen purpose.

We can summarize the findings of this section by stating simply that some denial, repression and control are the necessary prerequisites for success in any field of human endeavor. In acquiring knowledge, some persons, because of well-disposed

habet aliquod proprium unde potest reniti imperio rationis. Unde experimur, irascibilem vel concupisibilem rationi repugnare per hoc quod sentimus vel imaginamur aliquod delectabile quod ratio vetat; vel triste quod ratio praecipit. I, q. 81, a. 3, ad 2um.

sense organs, enjoy an advantage. Yet, even for these talented persons and all the more for those less-gifted, habits of knowledge are developed only by a process of subordinating the sense faculties to the work of the intellect. This involves a degree of denial and control. Moral virtues which perfect the whole man demand much greater control and denial. Thus we can state that, excluding the habits of vice and the habits of first principles, a certain degree of temperance, control and repression is a prerequisite and concomitant condition for the formation of every operative habit and therefore for success in human endeavor.

III. MORTIFICATION AS A MEANS OF DEVELOPING TEMPERANCE.

It is in acquiring of the virtue of temperance that we can see more vividly and more in detail how an element of mortification enters in to the development of a moral virtue. Temperance regulates the use of food, drink and venereal pleasure. We consider this virtue more in detail because it is in constant use in our daily lives. Comparing temperance to meekness, the virtue which governs anger, St. Thomas notes that the impetuosity of anger is caused by some incident as a painful hurt and that therefore it soon passes, though its impetus be great. But the impetuosity of the desires for pleasures of touch proceeds from a natural cause. Therefore this desire is more lasting and more general.¹⁸ Pleasures of touch occur every day so that temperance is in very general use.¹⁹

Temperance is not only in constant use, it is also of vital importance in the conducting of human life. For this we can quote the authority of St. Thomas. He states that temperance withholds us from those things which are most seductive, from things which have a most disturbing effect on the soul.²⁰ The

¹⁸ "Impetus irae causatur ex quodam accidente, puta ex aliqua laesione contristante: et ideo cito transit, quamvis magnum impetum habeat. Sed impetus concupiscentiae delectabilium tactus procedit ex causa naturali: unde est diuturnior et communior." II-II, q. 141, a. 7, ad 2um.

¹⁹ II-II, q. 141, a. 8, ad 3um.

²⁰ "Ex circa quae est temperantia maxime possunt animum inquietare. . . ." II-II, q. 141, a. 2, ad 2um.

things from which temperance withholds us pertain to the lowest part in man, his animal nature, and therefore it is natural that such things should defile him. Temperance withstands the vices that bring most dishonor on man.²¹ Intemperance is opposed to man's clarity and beauty because the pleasures which are the matter of intemperance dim the light of reason from which all the clarity and beauty of virtue arises.²² Because this virtue is in such constant use and is so important in leading a truly human life, and because it shows in a clear way the mutual working of our dual nature, we use it as an example to illustrate the function of mortification in developing a virtue.

Temperance has as its task the regulating and controlling of the concupiscent appetite. To discuss the virtue of temperance we must first examine the passions which this virtue regulates. A passion is an operation, a movement of the sense appetite which follows upon sense knowledge and is necessarily accompanied by some bodily transformation. The soul alone is not and cannot be the subject of a passion. The true subject of a passion is the composite of both soul and body and the true nature of a passion is both psychic and somatic. While a physical transmutation is related to the act of sense knowledge only *per accidens*, such a transformation is ordered *per se* to the act of sense appetition, so that in the very definition of passion there is included some natural transmutation of the organ.

The word passion stresses the passive side of the movement of the sense appetite. But a passion is an active thing as well. The sense appetite, in operation, together with its concomitant bodily reactions, is passive in the sense that it has been acted upon by the attractive sensible good. Thus the organ may be called the patient and the sensible good the agent. Nonetheless, in its own right a passion is definitely active. For it is a tendency, a striving toward the agent, a positive aspiration to possess the sensible good.

²¹ II-II, q. 141, a. 2, ad 3um.

²² II-II, q. 142, a. 4, c.

The object of the concupiscent appetite is that which is delightful to sense. The first movement of this appetite called love is the attraction which the appetite receives from the object itself. The object apprehended as good impresses itself on the faculty and proportions the faculty to itself. Love adapts the faculty to the object, creates in the appetite a convenience with the object. Love is the active, vital reaction of the appetite to the drawing force of the object.

Good causes in the sense appetite a certain inclination, aptitude or connaturalness in respect to itself. But if the good is not yet possessed, it causes in the appetite a movement toward the attainment of the good loved. And this is the passion of desire or concupiscence.²³ Pleasure is that movement of the sense appetite which follows the possession of the desired good. At the moment of pleasure, the appetite rests and is quieted.

The virtue of temperance governs the pleasures of touch. Because the pleasures of touch are the greatest of all bodily pleasures and are so vehement,²⁴ the passions of love and concupiscence moving toward these pleasures are likewise vehement. The concupiscent appetite attains its greatest impetuosity and consequently its most dangerous excess at the instant of desire. The effect of love, when the beloved object is not possessed, is concupiscence. And as Augustine says, we are more sensitive to love when we lack that which we love. Consequently, of all the concupiscent passions, concupiscence is most felt.²⁵ And temperance must govern and control the passions of love and concupiscence tending toward the vehement pleasures of touch.

To speak of developing temperance we must first treat of the virtue of continence. St. Thomas uses the word continence to describe the virtue whereby a man resists evil desires which are vehement in him. It is the task of continence to regulate

²³ I-II, q. 23, a. 4.

²⁴ "Quia manifestum est quod id quod est naturale in unoquoque, est potentissimum. Hujusmodi autem delectationes tactus sunt ad quas ordinatur concupiscentiae naturales, sicut cibi et venerea et hujusmodi." I-II, q. 31, a. 6.

²⁵ I-II, q. 25, a. 2, ad 1um.

the pleasures of touch. But continence resides in the will and not in the concupiscent power. In this it differs from temperance. In the continent man the concupiscent appetite breaks out into evil and vehement desires. But the will chooses not to follow them. With temperance residing in the concupiscent appetite, this appetite is rendered submissive to reason in such a way that ordinarily, vehement passions contrary to reason do not arise in it. In the continent man the concupiscent appetite is not submissive. It resists reason by its vehement desires. Continence has something of virtue and in another way it falls short of the idea of virtue. Continence can be compared to temperance as the imperfect to the perfect.

The man who desires to practice continence and to develop the virtue of continence into the virtue of temperance has a difficult task facing him. For the married person continence regarding venereal pleasure means using one's sexual function properly and solely with one's married partner. For the unmarried it means total abstention from deliberate sexual pleasure. The continent man must govern his reproductive function according to right reason. This reproductive function is numbered among his vegetative powers and is not under the direct control of the will. The acts of the generative function are controlled by the will indirectly through its control of the sense appetite.²⁶

This process we wish to describe more in detail. Neither the intellect nor the will operates in a spiritual vacuum. Man possesses besides his spiritual powers the inferior powers of sensory and vegetative life. These lower faculties and their acts are not in complete isolation from the operation of the intellect and the will. There is a constant inter-action between the lower and higher powers. Because all of the faculties are related to the one soul as their principle, their acts are inextricably interwoven with one another. The absolute dependence of the intellect upon the senses as the material and instrumental cause of intellectual knowledge is a fundamental truth of Thomistic

²⁶ I-II, q. 17, a. 8, ad 3um.

psychology. Man must derive his knowledge by way of abstraction from sensible matter. The will is in a somewhat similar position. The appetitive acts of the sensory part are constantly affecting the acts of the rational appetite. The will is an appetite that finds itself, as it were, surrounded by other appetites, each calling upon it to lend support to its inclinations and to add its consent to the objects which have moved it.

Because of his dual or two-fold nature man is in the unique position of having a two-fold elicited appetite, the will and the sense appetite. The movements of these appetites are sometimes parallel, often diverse. Each appetite is moved according to its own object and according to the laws of its own particular nature. When these objects conflict, there is an inward struggle. It ends only when one appetite succumbs to the other. Therefore, in its activity, the will does not operate in the realm of pure spirituality. It operates as existing in a being which participates in both the world of spirit and the world of matter.

No other faculty of the soul can move the will by efficient causality. The intellect can move the will by presenting it with its object and by means of this object exercises formal and final causality on the will. The senses and the sense appetite can move the will mediately through the intellect. That which is apprehended under the aspect of the good and the suitable moves the will in the manner of an object. But an object appears good and suitable because of two factors, the condition of the thing proposed and the condition of the one to whom it is proposed. But a man is changed to a certain disposition by reason of some passion so that something appears suitable to him which would not appear suitable to him were he not affected by that passion. In this way, by influencing the condition of the one who is to make a judgment, the passions influence the will which follows on the judgment.²⁷

²⁷ "Id quod apprehenditur sub ratione boni et convenientis movet voluntatem per modum objecti. Quod autem aliquid videatur bonum et conveniens, ex duobus contigit: scilicet ex conditione ejus quod proponitur et ejus cui proponitur. . . .

The passions therefore influence the will through the intellect. This they can do because of the nature of the intellect's activity in presenting an object to the will as desirable. This can be seen from a consideration of the mutual causality of intellect and will.

The will enjoys an active indifference towards the objects presented to it. It has the power to choose or refuse them. It cannot be forced or coerced to choose any particular object presented to it. The active indifference of the will must extend to the judgment which specifies the act of the will. Otherwise the will would be coerced by the intellect and would not be free. To say simply and without qualification that the will follows the judgment of the intellect is to assign an extrinsic determination to the will that destroys its freedom.

Yet we cannot say that the will is independent of the intellectual judgment, for the will is precisely the appetite that follows upon the judgment of the intellect. If the intellect presents an object which it has judged to be preferred over the others, the will follows the judgment of the intellect. To understand how the will follows upon the judgment of the intellect and yet retains its freedom of choice, we must understand the nature of the judgment which the will follows.

Among the judgments of the intellect we distinguish speculative judgments and practical judgments. A speculative judgment is an act of the intellect which simply affirms a truth and which has no reference to any kind of action. A practical judgment is a judgment ordered to action, either remotely or proximately. If such a judgment merely expresses a universal principle of action, it is called a "speculativo-practical" judgment. It is remotely ordered to action. The practical judgment proximately ordered to action is called "practico-practical." It is a singular, particular judgment, made in the light of all the present, individuating circumstances and conditions in which the subject finds himself. Only this

Manifestum est autem quod secundum passionem appetitus sensitivi immutatur homo ad aliquam dispositionem. Unde secundum quod homo est in passione aliqua videtur sibi aliquid conveniens quod non videtur extra passionem existenti."

practico-practical judgment is sufficiently particular to serve as that knowledge from which an act of the will immediately flows. Confronted with the particular situation in which this particular subject finds himself and surrounded by all the conditions and circumstances which are unrenewable and unique to this particular case, the intellect is able to consider the possible courses of action with a complete indifference. It can compare the various courses of action, each a particular good, with the idea of the perfect good and can see in each no compelling reason for action.

To formulate a practical judgment, man must leave the sphere of the abstract and the universal and must descend to the realm of particular and individual. Only here can he lay hold of the singular object which can serve as the end and purpose of action.²⁸ But it is in this same sphere of concrete and singular that the movement of the sense appetite arise. These passions, aroused by the apprehension of sense and with the bodily changes that accompany them, can alter the cognitive character of the senses, particularly of the imagination and of the cogitative power because these are faculties using bodily organs. Since these faculties are the means by which the intellect can know the singular, any modification of their cognitive operations will necessarily affect the judgment of the practical reason. For this reason the judgment of the practical reason is often at variance with the speculative judgment which is not affected by the passions.

In *De Veritate* St. Thomas says that the good grasped by the universal reason does not move the will except by a particular apprehension, because actions are in the sphere of particulars. And because of passion there can be bodily change in this realm of sense. This change, resulting from the passion, hinders and can sometimes completely blind the particular

²⁸ "... cum motus et operationes sint in singularibus, et ab universali propositione non possit fieri descensus ad conclusionem particularem nisi mediante assumptione particulari; non potest universalis conceptio intellectus applicari ad electionem operis, quae est quasi conclusio in operabilibus, ut dicitur in VII Ethic., nisi mediante apprehensione particulari." Q. D. De Ver., q. 14, a. 4, ad 3um.

apprehension so that what the superior reason knows in the universal it cannot apply to the particular case. Thus the will is moved toward that good which the particular reason presents and not by the good presented by the intellect.²⁹

In the *Summa Theologica* he treats the same problem. He states that a passion of the sensitive appetite can move the will only indirectly, first by a certain abstraction. All the soul's powers are rooted in the one essence of the soul and therefore, when one power performs an intense act, another power becomes remiss or is even entirely impeded. This occurs because the energy of the soul, being centered on one thing, is less able to be directed to several, and the attention of the soul, being fixed on one thing, is withheld from others. Secondly, a passion affects the will indirectly because the judgment and apprehension of reason are impeded by a vehement and inordinate apprehension of the imagination and the judgment of the estimative power. The apprehension of the imagination and the judgment of the estimative power follow the passion of the sensitive appetite and therefore those affected by a passion do not easily turn their imagination away from the object of the passion. Thus the judgment of the reason often follows the passion of the sensitive appetite and as a result, the will follows it also, since it is natural for it to follow the judgment of the reason.³⁰

²⁹ "Objectum enim voluntatis est bonum apprehensum, sed bonum apprehensum a ratione universali non movet nisi mediante apprehensione particulari ut dicitur in III de Anima, eo quod actus sunt in particularibus. Ex ipsa autem passione appetitus sensitivi potest esse interdum complexio corporis, quaecumque impressio corporalis: quia ex hoc quod appetitus ille utitur organo, impeditur et interdum totaliter ligatur ipsa particularis apprehensio, vel id quod ratio superior dictat in universali, ut non applicetur actu ad hoc particulare. Et sic voluntas in appetendo movetur ad illum bonum quod sibi nuntiat apprehensio particularis, praetermisso illo bono quod nuntiat ratio universalis." *De Ver.*, q. 22, a. 9, ad 6um.

³⁰ "Passio appetitus sensitivi non potest directe trahere aut movere voluntatem, sed indirecte potest; et hoc dupliciter: uno modo quidem secundum quamdam abstractionem; cum enim omnes potentiae animae in una essentia animae radicentur, necesse est quod quando una potentia intenditur in suo actu, altera in suo actu remittatur, vel etiam totaliter in suo actu impediatur, tum quia omnis virtus ad plura dispersa sit minor, unde e contrario quando intenditur circa unum, minus potest ad alia dispergi; tum quia in operibus animae requiritur quaedam intentio, quae dum vehementer applicatur ad unum, non potest alteri vehementer attendere

We see, therefore, that the intellect must make use of the internal senses to bring to act the knowledge that it possesses in an habitual manner. Gripped by a passion which fixes the imagination and the cogitative power exclusively upon the delightful object, the subject is faced with great difficulty in producing a contrary phantasm, a phantasm needed by the intellect to actualize the habitual knowledge by which the sensible object would be judged in a rational way.

The fact that there is a discrepancy between what the intellect affirms as good in the universal and what it judges to be good in the last practical judgment shows that there are in the mind two universal judgments and consequently two particular judgments deducible from them in the mind. The passion which arises can greatly hinder the reason in making a practical conclusion under the one universal and can incline it very strongly toward making the practical conclusion under the other universal.

The freedom of the will depends upon the freedom of the intellect to deliberate on the merits of the alternative courses of action. The will's freedom demands as a prerequisite that the intellect should not be so bound by a passion that it cannot consider those things which are contrary to the object of the passion. So long as the reason remains indifferent in the presence of passion and is able to judge that the object of the passion is only a particular good, the will remains free to accept or reject that object to which the passion inclines.

The will can move the sense appetite only through the imagination and the cogitative power. Once the imagination and the cogitative power have provided the sense appetite with

alio modo ex parte objecti voluntatis, quod est bonum ratione apprehensum. Impeditur enim judicium et apprehensio rationis propter vehementem et inordinatam apprehensionem imaginationis et judicium virtutis aestimativa, ut patet in amenibus. Manifestum est autem quod passionem appetitus sensitivi sequitur imaginationis apprehensio et judicium aestimativa, sicut etiam dispositionem linguae sequitur judicium gustus; unde videmus quod homines in aliqua passione existentes non facile imaginationem avertunt ab his quae afficiuntur; unde per consequens judicium rationis plerumque sequitur passionem sensitivi, et per consequens, motus voluntatis, qui natus est semper sequi judicium rationis." I-II, q. 77, a. 1.

its object, the appetite tends toward that object and the will cannot destroy this natural movement of the sense appetite.

The task of the will, therefore, is clear. To maintain its supremacy, to assure its predominance over the urgings of the passions, the will must be able to cause the internal senses to produce a substitute image for the one which is giving rise to a passion which it wishes to remove. The will has the power to move the intellect in the formation of the last practical judgment by which the act of the will is specified. To make this singular judgment, the intellect must revert to the sphere of the singular. This it can do only by reverting to the internal senses. Therefore the will can exercise unhampered control over the practical judgment of the intellect only by controlling the internal senses, by having them call forth the precise image it wants. But the will's control over the imagination and consequently over the other internal senses of memory and cogitative power is hampered by the passions.

It is a phantasm of the imagination further elaborated by the conjoined working of the cogitative power and memory that presents the passions with their object. The passions, upon receiving their object, immediately function. And with the awakening of the passions there occurs a connatural bodily transformation. The imagination, cogitative power and memory are also organic faculties. They are strongly influenced in their operation by the bodily transformation caused by the passions. The precise effect of the bodily transformation caused by the passion is to rivet and to fix the attention of the imagination and of the other internal senses on the object of the passions. Being on the same organic plane with the passions, the internal senses are greatly disturbed by the bodily movement caused by the passions. The vehement movement of the passions focuses the attention of these internal senses on the object of the passions. Therefore, once the passions are aroused by an object presented to them by the internal senses, the whole bent of the internal senses is toward that object which they have presented to the passions. Unless a higher power intervenes, the attention

of these senses will remain riveted on this object. Profoundly influenced by the bodily movement of the passions, they become captivated by the object pleasing to the senses. Because the intellect in making a practico-practical judgment must revert to the sphere of the singular, must revert to the internal senses and because these same internal senses, disturbed by the bodily movement of the passions, have their attention fixed upon the object pleasing to the passions, the passions hamper the judgment of the intellect, the judgment which specifies the will.

This is the precise case of the continent man. In him vehement passions urging him to illicit sexual pleasure arise. The phantasm of the imagination further elaborated by the memory and cogitative power presents the passions of love and concupiscence with their object. In this case the object is a venereal delight. The commingled passions of love and concupiscence, upon being presented with their object, immediately move toward that object. The continent person has made by means of his practical intellect a speculativo-practical judgment that all deliberate sexual pleasures contrary to right reason are to be avoided. Yet here and now he is confronted with a particular situation and he must make a practico-practical judgment. His judgment will either be a practical conclusion flowing from the speculativo-practical judgment that all illicit deliberate sexual pleasures are to be avoided, or it will be a practico-practical judgment flowing from another speculativo-practical judgment that sexual pleasures are very delightful and therefore to be chosen.

The internal senses have presented the passions of love and desire with an object pleasing to them. The passions cause a bodily transformation which in the case of venereal pleasure is particularly vehement. The internal senses consequently have their attention riveted on this pleasurable object. Profoundly disturbed by the movement of the passions, they are captivated by the pleasing object. Now the intellect, to make its practico-practical judgment, must revert to the phantasm. But the phantasm that it finds present is that of the illicit,

sexual object, an object opposed to right reason. The intellect need not make its practico-practical judgment in favor of that object. The will can exercise its control and make the intellect deliberate on the opposite object; abstention from sexual delight here and now and can determine the judgment to choose this abstention. But as long as the passions remain aroused they disturb the internal senses and keep the attention of the internal senses transfixated on their object. By their bodily transformation they continue to influence and to disturb the internal senses which operate on the same bodily plane as the passions. Because the intellect is so dependent upon the sensible phantasm, its attention is also being focused on the sexual satisfaction. Consequently the will has a tremendous struggle to cause the intellect to make its judgment contrary to sexual satisfaction. The will is not necessitated by the urgings of the passions. But as long as they remain aroused, greater and special strength of will must be expended to resist them. As long as they remain awakened the struggle will continue.

The will can exercise a certain control over the passions by causing the internal senses to present a different phantasm to the passions. The will does this by directing the attention of the internal senses and the intellect to some other object. Deprived of the phantasm which has caused them to arise, the passions with their accompanying bodily transformation subside and the will can continue more tranquilly in its resolve to abstain from all illicit sexual enjoyment. But often the offending phantasm, though rejected and dispelled, will continue to return unbidden into the imagination. Thus the struggle continues. The will must continue to make strong and determined acts, forcing the intellect to consider an object different from that which aroused the passions.

This is precisely the plight of the continent man who must resist desires in him which are vehement. For continence has for its matter the desires for pleasures of touch, not as moderating them, but rather its task is to resist them.

Because continence is related to temperance as the imperfect

to the perfect, the beginning of the virtue of temperance is the virtue of continence. To convert continence into temperance the will must repeat over and over its victories over the sense appetite. By repeated victories it acquires control over the concupiscent appetite. This must be a control of such a kind that no longer will the passions rush vehemently toward the object pleasing to them, but rather will submit calmly to the command of the will, and will move toward an object pleasing to them only insofar as the will permits.

Moral virtues are habits of choosing the means. Attaining the mean of virtue is difficult. This is certainly true of those virtues dealing with the passions. To decline from a mean is easy. Following Aristotle, St. Thomas states that precisely because of the difficulty involved in attaining the mean of virtue, he who is striving to attain this mean should recede more from that extreme which is more contrary to the virtue desired.³¹ Now it is stated in the *Summa* that the opposite of lust is not found in many because men are more inclined to pleasure. St. Thomas remarks also, in his *Commentary on the Ethics*, that only infrequently does it happen that men fail by defect in regard to pleasure, by enjoying less pleasure than they ought, less than is required for health and good disposition of the body and for fitting dealings with their fellow men.³² Sins of intemperance are most common because they are connected with the common use of human life and in these many happen to sin.³³

In the *Commentary on the Ethics* we read also that all are naturally inclined to pleasures and delights. Therefore they who are striving for virtue must be on their guard against these pleasures because once something is apprehended as delightful, it easily draws the appetite. It is difficult to make a correct judgment about pleasure because, while dwelling upon it and considering it, the appetite is so strongly drawn toward it.

³¹ *Expositio in Decem Libros Ethicorum*, Lib II, Lectio XI.

³² *Ibid.*, Lib III, Lectio XXI.

³³ II-II, q. 142, a. 4, Objectio 2.

It is not difficult, therefore, to see that, if in striving for virtue one must recede more from that extreme which is more contrary to the virtue desired, then in striving for temperance, efforts must be directed against unduly bodily pleasure and delights. Aristotle illustrates this process. If we have a bent piece of wood and we wish to straighten it, we must bend in quite far in the opposite direction if we wish to restore it to its original position. St. Thomas adds that this is the most efficacious way of attaining a virtue and is the way marked out for those who have a really strong desire to avoid vice and practice virtue.³⁴

Because the pleasures of touch are so alluring, to attain the virtue of temperance one must bend his energies in the opposite direction. The first requisite for the practice of temperance is a strict control over the external senses. Such strict control over the sense of sight is vital because the imagination relies so heavily on the sense of sight for so many of its images.

Despite control over external senses, phantasms of forbidden objects will arise in the imagination. Control of this faculty is all important in the acquiring of temperance because ultimately it supplies the material for the object of the passions. The will can never acquire complete control over this faculty. But it can bring it to a certain subjection. The imagination, if left to itself, will wander through the whole gamut of sensible phantasms it has within its possession. It will take the phantasms it has stored up and by combining them, will form new and varied phantasms. It is a ceaseless, tireless movie machine, producing images delightful to the sensitive part of man since it is to this realm in man that it belongs. The images it produces, because they are pleasing to sense, will be elaborated by the cogitative power and will serve to arouse the various passions of the sense appetite.

But the will can take this tireless faculty in hand, can bend and mold its activity so that in its activity it will not serve merely the sensitive part. The will can direct the imagination's energy and activity to supply phantasms that the intellect

³⁴ *Expositio in Decem Libros Ethicorum*, Lib. II, Lectio XI.

needs in acquiring knowledge. By refusing to allow the imagination unlimited freedom, by harnessing its energy and making it use its energy to serve the intellect, the will acquires a certain control over this restless faculty so that it will obey the directions and commands of the will with a certain docility. By means of study and judicious reading a person can direct his imagination along proper channels, can see to it that it is occupied with objects not contrary to the demands of temperance. A person can train his imagination too, so that as soon as an unlawful phantasm arises and he becomes aware of it, immediately he can make his imagination fasten its attention on some other phantasm chosen beforehand for precisely such an occasion, a phantasm the imagination and the whole sensitive part will find pleasing, without its being representative of an object contrary to the moral law.

Through controlling the operation of the imagination proper, the will controls the workings of the other two internal sense faculties of memory and the cognitive power. Thus indirectly, it attains a certain mastery over the passions. When once it has attained this mastery over the passions, the will is not forced to fight and struggle against vehement sense desires. By closely guarding the internal sense faculties in their operation and by refusing to choose the objects which the passions find pleasing, the will begins to forge a control over the concupiscent appetite. This appetite, if left to itself, becomes stronger, more vehement and more impulsive until a very insignificant stimulus suffices to awaken and arouse it. But if the will checks and curbs and controls this appetite carefully through controlling and checking the internal senses the concupiscent appetite loses some of its vehemence and impulsiveness. Gradually its movement and energy yield more easily, calmly and submissively to the direction of the will.

This submissiveness of the concupiscent appetite, this control exercised over it by the will is the fruit of self-denial, denial of the external senses, denial of the imagination's desire for uncontrolled freedom, denial of the concupiscent appetite as

it moves toward an object pleasing to it. A virtue such as temperance is bought by constant curtailing of our faculties. It is the result of mortification.

To attain the virtue of temperance, denial and mortification are especially requisite for certain persons. The concupiscence of pleasure thrives in the young on account of the ardor of youth.³⁵ Youths therefore, because their passions are so easily aroused and because, being unmarried, no sexual satisfaction is allowed them, must practice an incessant and stern brand of mortification if they hope to gain the virtue of temperance. Among adults, in this matter, some have more need of mortification than others. Some people have a natural disposition for some particular virtue.³⁶ For some the practice of temperance offers little difficulty. Hence for them, the practice of mortification is not of vital importance in attaining to temperance. But many others have a special propensity to difficulties in this matter. This is true especially of those who have contracted a habit of lust. Venereal pleasures are impetuous and if one consents to them, this increases the force of concupiscence and weakens the strength of mind.³⁷ St. Thomas compares intemperance to a child's manner of acting. He states that a child, if left to his own will, becomes more self-willed. So too concupiscence, if indulged, gathers strength. Therefore Augustine says: (Conf. VIII, 5) "Lust served, became a custom and custom not resisted became a necessity."³⁸ People addicted to a habit of lust can attain to temperance only by a special and more severe checking of their sensitive nature according to the principle enunciated above.

Mortification, therefore, is ordinarily an absolute requisite in attaining mastery over the concupiscent appetite that is signified by temperance. When once this mastery has been attained, this mortification remains necessary, lest habit be corrupted by contrary passions. But this mortification becomes easier to practice, since as an essential part of the virtue, it

³⁵ II-II, q. 149, a. 4.

³⁶ I-II, q. 63, a. 1.

³⁷ II-II, q. 151, a. 3, ad 2um.

³⁸ II-II, q. 142, a. 2.

has become, with the virtue, a sort of second nature. It no longer has the difficult aspect that is presented at the beginning of the habit's formation. Denial, and with it a submission of the appetite to the will, has become a second nature. Once this battle has been won the soul is freed from vehement struggles and has greater strength and freedom to push on to greater victories over the sensitive part. By means of control and denial, temperance can be developed and perfected until man has acquired such a perfect mastery over the sensitive part that as far as nature allows, it neglects the needs of the body.³⁹

IV. PROPOSED SOLUTIONS TO THE PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEMS OF MORTIFICATION.

A. *Problems of Mortification in the Development of Virtue.*

The purpose of this study is to determine the psychological function of mortification in the development of virtue. We have described in some detail the process of mortification involved in the development of the virtue of temperance. This detailed description shows how the external senses supply material for the internal senses. The internal sense elaborate this material. In doing so they supply the passions with their object. Once the passions are awakened they tend to fix the attention of the internal senses on the object pleasing to them. Consequently, reason experiences difficulty in choosing an object different from the object which the passions find alluring. The internal senses, disturbed and agitated by the bodily movement of the passions, tend to be entranced by the object pleasing to the passions. Since the intellect must rely on material presented to it by the internal senses, the intellect's attention is drawn to the object pleasing to the passions and reason experiences great difficulty in choosing another object. But the will is not determined to choosing that object. Rather, it has the power to cause the intellect to consider another object and can make the intellect choose this other object. Also, the will can control the workings of the passions by exercising a control over the

³⁹ I-II, q. 61, a. 5.

operations of the internal senses of imagination, memory and the cogitative power. The description of this process brought into strong relief the fact that man's cognitive and appetitive powers, both rational and sensitive, are interwoven and interlocked in their operations. If the operation of one faculty is to predominate, the other faculties must be brought to serve that particular faculty.

All the powers of the soul are rooted in the one essence of the soul. Hence it necessarily happens that when the intention of the soul is strongly drawn toward the action of one power, it is withdrawn from the operation of another power.⁴⁰ The various actions of the soul can hamper and impede one another. When the attention of the soul is focused on one operation or when one power of the soul is to be specially perfected, the other powers of the soul lend their energy to that particular favored potency. The other powers continue their own operation, at least up to a certain point. But their own proper operation, their tendency to their own proper object, is directed and controlled and channeled toward helping and assisting the particular faculty which is being specially favored and perfected. The operation of the other faculties continues. These faculties move toward their own objects, but their movements are controlled in such a way that these operations are brought into line and made to serve and assist in developing a more perfect operation of the favored faculty. When the operation of one faculty is intense, the operation of the other is remiss. The reason for this is that when one potency is intensely engaged, this one potency alone does not suffice for such an intense operation unless it is assisted by receiving from the principle of life the inflow that the other faculties or members should receive.⁴¹ This process is necessary for even one act. It is all the more necessary for the development of an operative habit. In the development of an operative habit, a certain

⁴⁰ Quia omnes potentiae animae in una essentia animae radicantur necesse est quod, quando intentio animae vehementer trahitur ad operationem unius potentiae, retrahatur ab operatione alterius. I-II, q. 37, a. 1.

⁴¹ *Scriptum Super Libros Sententiarum*, IV, 44, 21 qu 3, 4um.

power of the soul is brought to a degree of perfection. But developing an operative habit involves more than perfecting one particular power. Other powers of the soul, as a natural consequence, must become more remiss in their activity. Indeed, to develop an operative habit the other powers of the soul are not merely allowed to grow remiss, They must be positively checked in their own activity and made to serve and minister to the activity of the favored potency.

This process is very apparent in the development of the various intellectual habits. It is even more apparent, more necessary in developing moral virtues. Our rational nature, as reason, is composed of intellect and will. Because the intellect is a spiritual faculty, it contains all reality within the scope of its knowledge, has universal being and truth as its common formal object. The will, as the appetite following upon intellect's knowledge, has a commensurate object, the universal good. It has unlimited possibilities of choice. When once reason has fastened upon some determinate end to be attained, the will can use its own operation and the operations of the other powers of the soul to attain that end. This it is able to do because contained under its universal object are all of its own operations and the operations of the other potencies of the soul. Therefore, the will as an efficient cause, can move itself and all the other potencies of the soul to their proper acts.⁴² Habits are formed in the various potencies of the soul by repeated acts. The habit can be formed directly in the will, such as the habit of justice, or in the intellect, such as the habit of prudence, or in the sensitive appetite as is the case with fortitude and temperance. In the development of each operative habit the practical intellect exercises its control over the operations of intellect and will and over the operations of the other potencies of the soul.

The moral virtues of temperance and fortitude signify a control of reason over the sensible part. Prudence presupposes that degree of control over the sensitive part which will allow

⁴² *Summa Theol.*, I-II, q. 9, a. 1.

it to choose well, undisturbed by any undue cravings for sensible pleasures. Because it signifies a habit of right choice, it presupposes likewise a control and care exercised for a long time by the practical intellect over its own choices. Justice, the virtue residing in the will, by which a man easily and as from second nature gives everyone his due, results from a practice of constantly subduing selfish interests as soon as they conflict with the rights of others. All of the virtues contained under the four cardinal virtues as integral, subjective or potential parts, indicate a habit developed by repeated acts. In each act, reason has had to exercise its prerogative of control over its own operations and over the operations of the other powers of the soul. By repeated acts its control has become more sure and certain; it flows more simply and easily.

This sure and certain control exercised in the operation of intellectual and moral virtues is the result of restraint exercised over the various human faculties and powers. This restraint is not in the form of a complete repression by which the faculty or power is denied its operation. But it is a channelling, a directing of the faculty's operation toward an objective chosen by reason. This control is a prerequisite, a concomitant of every operative habit. It is a general condition of soul that is found as a necessary part of each intellectual and moral virtue. It is what St. Thomas means when he speaks of the general virtue of temperance. Every good operative habit presupposes and requires a rather firm control over human operations, potencies and passions. This control is the temperateness, the moderation which St. Thomas calls the general virtue of temperance. This general virtue of temperance, when applied to the acquiring of moral virtues, acquires the name of mortification. Mortification is then the self-denial and control that is a necessary element in the development and growth of moral virtue. It is a prerequisite and a concomitant of every moral virtue, a general condition of soul found in all virtues, a necessary condition of virtue. With this idea of mortification in mind we can proceed to consider the questions proposed in Part I.

B. *Relation of the Inflicting of Pain and Mastery Over Sense Passions.*

Will the inflicting of pain by means of the discipline and cilicium lessen and subdue the cravings of the flesh for sexual delights? What indeed is the precise psychological connection between this inflicting of pain and victory over a yearning for sexual delights?

The answer seems to be contained in the doctrine on the passions and the control of the passions as exercised by the virtues. It is precisely the task of temperance to govern and control the passions of the concupiscent appetite. When an object is presented to the passions as pleasing to them, the passions of love and desire for that object arise. Love gives the sense appetite a connatural affinity for the objects and makes it proportionate to that object. Immediately upon this first movement of complacency in the object there follows desire for that object, a movement toward that object. If the object is attained, there results the passion of pleasure, a vital adhering to the object. It is precisely these movements that temperance must control in its struggle for mastery over the concupiscent appetite. Corresponding to the movements toward a delightful object are the movements away from an unpleasant object. If the object is presented to the passions as harmful or unpleasant, there arises the movements of hatred and flight from the unpleasant object and sorrow or sadness at its presence.

The purpose of inflicting pain on one's body with the discipline or cilicium cannot be to suppress all feeling in the sense of touch. It is impossible to do this. To strive for such a purpose would almost inevitably cause serious psychological difficulties. The purpose of discipline is rather to gain a control over the movements of the concupiscent appetite. Ordinarily, as soon as pain is felt in the sense of touch, the passions of hate, aversion, and sorrow arise in the concupiscent appetite. The passions, presented with an object distasteful to them, tend away from the object and if the object persists, sadness

or sorrow arise in the subject. Reason, as the governor of the whole body, can exercise its control over these passions and over the will considered solely as a particular nature. The passions and the will naturally shrink from sensible pains and bodily suffering. But reason can choose these things in relation to an end. Sensuality and the will in man absolutely considered, shrink from burning. Yet will, as reason, may choose this burning for the sake of health.⁴³ Thus reason can inflict pain and accept this pain despite the opposite movements of the passions. These movements continue during the whole time of the inflicting or suffering of pain. Yet reason chooses the pain. In so doing it is forging a stronger mastery over the concupiscent appetite. By denying the movements of the concupiscent appetite away from an unpleasant object, reason's control over this appetite becomes stronger, more secure. When pleasurable objects are presented to the passions, pleasurable objects to which reason does not want to consent, reason by virtue of the control acquired by forcing the sensible appetite to submit to the choice of pain, can more easily set aside these cravings and yearnings of the sense appetite.

Ordinarily the passions, presented with a pleasurable object, tend to fix the attention of the cognitive faculties on this object and continue drawing reason toward that object. Reason can acquire control over these movements so that immediately, upon their mere appearance, it can step in and without difficulty refuse their prompting and urgings and turn its attention to other things. This control is acquired, not only by denying the passions of the concupiscent appetite objects pleasing to them, but also by deliberately restraining the passions in their flight from a displeasing object.

This then would seem to be the purpose of inflicting bodily pain upon oneself, to gain a mastery over the passions fleeing from that pain. It can be an effective means of acquiring control. Yet, while stressing its effectiveness, we must also admit its danger. It is a fact that for some the inflicting of

⁴³ III, q. 18, a. 5c.

bodily pains upon themselves is precisely a means of causing sexual delight or at least a means of arousing desire for sexual delight. To examine into the psychological process involved in masochism would lead us far afield. We merely mention the fact that the suffering of physical, bodily pain *can* cause the awakening of sexual desires in some persons. However, it is not a universal phenomenon. We maintain that, in general, a judicious use of the cilicium and the discipline can serve to give reason a mastery over the concupiscent passions. If, in a particular case, the inflicting of such pain causes sexual disturbance, this specific means must not be employed to attain mastery over the concupiscent appetite.

C. Is Mortification Dangerous?

Our second problem concerns the danger involved in denial and mortification as prescribed in books treating of the spiritual life. Will not a continual, ceaseless war against natural instincts, longings and desires destroy the correct and perfect balance of an individual? Will it not hinder the harmonious functioning of man's personality and deprive him of all the richness of his personality?

Mortification can be a dangerous thing. The reason for this is that it is a negative process, a withholding, a restraining, a cutting down of natural movements and tendencies. We have described mortification as the necessary prerequisite and concomitant of every good operative habit. Every operative habit, excluding the vices, signifies a training, a perfecting of a human faculty. For this training, special attention must be directed to that faculty. It must be developed and trained and made to perform ever more perfect acts that will engrain more deeply the habit that is being developed. This signifies a control, a checking, not only of the particular faculty developed, but also of the other faculties that are being made to serve in the formation of the habit. Each habit or virtue demands a certain withholding, denial, mortification. This denial is the negative aspect of the development of an intellectual or moral virtue.

Mortification is a general virtue, a general condition of every virtue. It is concomitant with the acquiring of every virtue, a controlling and directing action by which the energy and the functioning of various human faculties are directed toward the development of a particular virtue. We have seen, for example, how the passions, if left unchecked, are an obstacle to the virtue of temperance. As long as these passions have their own way, they disturb reason's peaceful possession. But by a checking and controlling of these passions, they are brought into line. Their functioning is made to serve reason's purpose and end. Temperance is not a chaining of the passions but a directing of them and their powers and energy to the higher good of reason.

Each of our powers tends to assume an independent role, to follow its own natural activity and thus to attain its natural object. It is reason's task in the development of habit to channel the various faculties with their operations and energies toward the habit desired. Every faculty, every power of the soul is made for activity. It is the task of mortification to direct these activities toward a particular chosen good.

Control and denial must be used in this way, as serving in the development of virtue and remaining as part of that virtue. It is dangerous if made an end in itself. Self-denial must not be destructive of nature, nor a denial of our essential sensible nature. Mortification must serve solely as a means of ordering, controlling and directing the faculties of our soul toward the attaining of intellectual and moral habits. If made an end in itself, mortification lacks any justifiable reason for its practice. This is not to deny its importance but simply to stress the fact that it must be practiced with some particular end in view and not simply for its own sake. It must be used as a means of fulfilling some duty or practicing some virtue.

That denial is necessary for the development of personality is obvious. If each faculty and potency of the soul were left to move with unrestrained freedom to its own object, the result would be a disordered personality, one in which the

sensible nature, by its very vehemence, would predominate, to the detriment of reason. Without denial and restraint there is little possibility of worthwhile accomplishment in any chosen field of endeavor. St. Thomas, speaking particularly of the pleasure governed by temperance, maintains that though nature has introduced pleasure into the operations that are necessary for man's life, it is sometimes praiseworthy and even necessary for the sake of an end to abstain from the pleasures which result from these operations. Thus, for the sake of the body's health, certain persons refrain from pleasures of meat, drink and sex. Denial is also necessary for fulfilling certain engagements. Athletes and soldiers have to deny themselves many pleasures to fulfill their duties. Penitents, to recover health of soul, have recourse to abstinence from pleasures and those who wish to give themselves up to contemplation and to divine things need to refrain very much from carnal things.⁴⁴

Thus we can see that denial and mortification are always linked with accomplishing some purpose, fulfilling some duty, developing some intellectual or moral virtue. In the practice of some virtues denial plays a far greater and more direct part than in others. For example, in the practice of temperance as a special virtue, denial is involved very directly, a greater or less denial according to the intensity to which the virtue is developed. The same is true of the virtue of penitence, that virtue which aims at the destruction of past sin considered as an offence against God. This virtue, as a species of justice, seeks to make some kind of compensation to God for sin committed. This compensation the penitent strives to make to God by abstaining from pleasure and submitting his body

⁴⁴ *Sciendum tamen quod ab hujusmodi delectationibus consequentibus hujusmodi operationis quandoque laudabile, vel etiam necessarium est abstinere propter aliquem finem; sicut propter sanitatem corporalem aliqui abstinent a quibusdam delectationibus ciborum, potuum et venereorum; et etiam propter alicujus officii executionem, sicut athletas et milites necesse est a multis delectationibus abstinere, ut proprium officium exequantur. Et similiter poenitentes, ad recuperandum animae sanitatem abstinentia delectabilium quasi quaedam diaeta, utuntur; et homines volentes contemplationi et rebus divinis vacare, oportet quod se magis a carnalibus desideriis abstrahant.* II-II, q. 142, a. 1.

to certain corporeal punishments. In other virtues denial performs a less prominent task. But in every virtue there is contained some denial, some mortification. No virtue, intellectual or moral, can exist without it.

With this thought in mind we can see how incorrect and inaccurate it is to maintain that St. Thomas is not a strong proponent of mortification. He devotes great attention to the virtue of temperance, that special virtue most closely linked with the practice of mortification. Moreover, in the practicing and carrying out of each virtue there is involved necessarily an element of mortification. The more intensely the virtue is developed the greater is the degree of mortification involved in its practice. According to the thought of St. Thomas, the virtues can be developed to a very high and intense degree. He speaks of perfecting virtues, virtues of men who are tending toward divine similitude. Prudence counts as nothing all the things of the world and directs all the thoughts of the soul to God alone. Temperance, as far as nature allows, neglects the needs of the body. Fortitude prevents the soul from being afraid of neglecting the body and rising to heavenly things, and justice consists in the soul's giving a wholehearted consent to follow the way thus prepared.⁴⁵ Obviously, each virtue, developed to such an exalted state, demands as a concomitant condition an equally intense degree of mortification and denial.

This consideration answers the difficulty of the danger involved in mortification. Certainly there is danger involved because of the very negative aspect of mortification. To deny oneself pleasure constantly and unremittingly, to practice constant denial of the external senses, allowing them little delight, choosing always food that is less palatable, eating not because eating is pleasant but simply and solely because it is God's will, keeping silence when there is a great desire to speak, halting in the midst of an absorbing story, always choosing the harder, the more unpleasant and less comfortable things, all this can easily be dangerous and lead to difficulties if not used

⁴⁵ I-II, q. 61, a. 5.

properly and correctly. All of these practices can serve as a means of developing the various virtues.

Virtue, even at its very lowest degree, demands a certain amount of mortification. As the virtue increases and grows, the practice of mortification likewise increases because it is part of that virtue. Because this denial and restraint are part of the virtue, they become second nature and are integrated into the smooth functioning of the personality. If used in connection with the developing of virtue, mortification undergoes growth parallel to and concomitant with the virtue. Considered in this way it is not dangerous. In one sense, it is a war against our natural instincts, longings and desires. But if carried out as a concomitant part of the development of virtue it is a well-regulated and gradual control of our human powers. It does not destroy the correct and perfect balance of an individual any more than does the development of virtue. With each increase of virtue there is also an increase in the process of greater control over our various faculties and powers. But in this case, mortification is constantly serving merely to direct the energy and functions of the human powers to a higher goal. Therefore, mortification does not give us an individual drained of all the richness of personality, but rather an individual whose powers and energies are all directed toward the higher goal of virtue and whose energies flow easily and effortlessly in that direction. As we have seen in the passage quoted above, the saint can practice a heroic mortification without an unbalancing of the personality because this severe, seemingly fierce mortification is the concomitant part of the heroic virtue to which the saint has attained. There is no void left in the personality. Having arrived at a high state of perfection, the saint is rapt in the things of God. The things of sensible nature hold little interest for him. But if such severe mortification be carried out by a person not so exalted in the ways of virtue, there is grave danger involved. When by our own free choice we renounce some particular good, there is a void left by that resignation. If that void is not filled by some higher motive or good, there

is danger that some compensation, even a compensation of a lower kind, will creep in to fill the void left by that renunciation.

This then is the answer to the question: "Is not mortification dangerous?" Not if used correctly, not if practiced as the natural concomitant of every virtue. It is dangerous if set up as an end in itself. Mortification and denial, carried out to the point described by St. John of the Cross, would be dangerous for an ordinary soul, a beginner in the spiritual life. Mortification, carried to this degree, seems to be that adapted to the souls which have attained to that state of virtue described by St. Thomas above. The various types of mortification proposed in the books on Asceticism as for instance, repressing an urge to speak or narrate a story, not gazing at some particularly beautiful and absorbing scene in nature, not reading letters immediately upon receiving them, all of these deliberate calculated mortifications of every natural and good desire can be dangerous psychologically if carried out too intensively. These acts of denial can serve a good purpose of developing a particular virtue or accomplishing some specific task or duty. But such mortification must be done calmly and gradually and without great psychological disturbances. If directed toward developing a virtue such as studiousness, temperance or penitence, acts of this kind performed calmly but steadily and perseveringly become, as part of the virtue, a second nature. Acts of this kind can be very valuable in the spiritual life. But they can become too aggressive, too intense, too much an attack on human nature with its inborn need for enjoyment and pleasure. In mortification of this type there is need of great prudence.

D. *How Mortification Strengthens the Will for Future Combats.*

The previous consideration leads us quite naturally into the next problem. Mortification as proposed in the books on Asceticism has as one of its aims the strengthening and reinforcing of the will. It is to prepare and to strengthen the will for future attacks. Victory or defeat in some sudden and violent

assault of passion, spiritual writers tell us, may well depend upon whether one has practiced self-discipline in such small matters as food or sleep or little acts of self-indulgence. Is there such a thing as strengthening of the will? Will the fact that a person denies himself, restrains his longings and desires for a satisfaction of one kind, will this self control help him and strengthen him to deny urgings of another kind? For instance, will the fact that a man performs some acts of denial each day at table, eats a bit less than he would like to eat, will that denial strengthen him to overcome desires for sexual pleasures when these desires press in upon him?

The answer to this question can be found in the doctrine on the connection of the moral virtues through prudence. A virtue is a good operative habit. A moral virtue is a habit which makes its possessor good and renders his work good. The intellectual virtues make a man good in this or that line and are therefore incomplete virtues. We cannot properly speak of the connection of the intellectual virtues. We do not observe in them the connection to be found among the moral virtues.⁴⁶ The moral virtues are complete and perfect virtues. They make the whole man good and not merely his faculties. The moral virtues of which we are speaking are those acquired by means of human works that are directed to an end not surpassing the natural power of man. These moral virtues, prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance, together with the parts contained under them, are all connected. Each moral virtue is bound to the others and so dependent on the others that one cannot exist in a subject without the others.

St. Thomas distinguishes between imperfect and perfect moral virtues. An imperfect moral virtue, temperance for example, is nothing more than an inclination to do some kind of good deed. The inclination can be either by natural temperament or by habituation. Moral virtues taken in this sense are not connected. Thus we can see men who, by natural temperament or by being merely accustomed to do so, are

⁴⁶ I-II, q. 65, a. 1, ad 3um.

prompt in performing works of liberality but are not prompt in doing works of chastity.⁴⁷ A man can exercise himself in good deeds regarding one matter but not in regard to another. For instance, by behaving well in matters of anger, but not in matters of concupiscence, he will acquire a certain habit of restraining his anger. But the habit will lack the nature of virtue through the absence of prudence which is wanting in matters of concupiscence.⁴⁸ Likewise some people have a certain temperance from a natural disposition insofar as certain imperfect virtues are natural to man or acquired by habituation. However, these virtues, through lack of prudence, are not perfect virtues because they are not perfected by reason.⁴⁹

But the perfect moral virtue is a habit that inclines toward doing a good deed well. And such a moral virtue cannot be without prudence. Moral virtue is a habit of choosing well and it makes a man choose well. It is proper to moral virtue to make a right choice. Right choice requires not only an inclination to a due end but also a correct choice of things conducive to that end. This choice is made by prudence which counsels, judges and commands in those things that are directed to the end.⁵⁰

Likewise we cannot have prudence unless we have the moral virtues. Prudence is right reason about things to be done, not

⁴⁷ I-II, q. 65, a. 1c.

⁴⁸ Dicendum quod virtutum moralium quaedam perficiunt hominem secundum communem statum, scilicet quantum ad ea quae communiter in omni vita hominum occurruunt agenda. Unde oportet quod homo simul exercitetur circa materias omnium virtutum moralium. Et si quidem circa omnes exercitetur bene operando, acquirat habitus omnium virtutum moralium. Si autem exercitetur bene operando circa unam materiam, non autem circa aliam, puta bene se habendo circa iras, non autem circa concupiscentias, acquirat quidem habitum aliquem ad refrenandum iras, qui tamen non habebit rationem virtutis, propter defectum prudentiae, quae circa concupiscentias corrumptitur. I-II, q. 65, a. 1, ad 1um.

⁴⁹ II-II, q. 141, a. 1, ad 2um.

⁵⁰ Nulla virtus moralis potest sine prudentia haberis: eo quod proprium virtutis moralis est facere electionem rectam, cum sit habitus electivus; ad rectam autem electionem non solum sufficit inclinatio in debitum finem quod est directe per habitum virtutis moralis; sed etiam quod aliquis directe eligat ea quae sunt ad finem, quod fit per prudentiam, quae est consiliativa et judicativa et praecceptiva eorum sunt ad finem. I-II, q. 65, a. 1.

merely in general, but also in particular, because actions are about particulars. Right reason demands principles according to which reason can proceed. And when reason considers particular cases, it needs not only universal but also particular principles. Regarding universal principles of action, man is rightly ordered or disposed by the natural understanding of principles whereby he understands that he should do no evil, or also by some practical science. But this is not enough for man to reason correctly about particular cases. It can happen that the universal principle known by means of understanding or science is corrupted in a particular case by a passion. Thus, when a person is swayed by concupiscence and is overcome by it, the object of his desire seems good, although it is opposed to the universal judgment of his reason. Consequently, just as by the habit of natural understanding of principles or of science, man is rightly disposed regarding universal principles of action, so for him to be correctly disposed regarding particular principles of action, he needs to be perfected by certain habits so that it becomes connatural for him to judge correctly as to the end. This is done by moral virtue. For the virtuous man judges correctly regarding the end of virtue because such as a man is, such does the end seem to him. Therefore right reason about particular things to be done, i. e., prudence, requires that man have moral virtue.⁵¹ Prudence, therefore, presupposes the moral virtues as a prerequisite in the same way that principles are prerequisites for the conclusions obtained by the various sciences. There can be no true moral virtues without prudence nor true prudence without the moral virtues. From this it follows clearly that all the moral virtues are connected with one another. He that has one perfect moral virtue has all of them.

A perfect moral virtue then, is one which through prudence is perfected by reason. No such perfect moral virtue can exist without prudence, for without prudence it is lacking in an essential element of virtue, namely, that it be totally according to right reason. But if one possesses prudence he necessarily

⁵¹ I-II, q. 58, a. 5.

possesses all of the moral virtues. Those things to which the moral virtues incline are as the principles of prudence. Therefore prudence, as right reason, needs all of the moral virtues to supply it with its principles. Else it might be correct in one matter or field, but lacking a certain moral virtue, it would be incorrect in judging and commanding those things pertaining to that moral virtue. Being deficient in that principle, it could not be called right reason.

Mortification is a concomitant part of each moral virtue. But the moral virtues are connected through prudence in such wise that if one such moral virtue is acquired all of them must be acquired. Also, by reason of their connection with prudence if one moral virtue grows and increases, the other moral virtues enjoy a simultaneous but proportionate growth. If a man sets about to acquire some moral virtue, he must, as a prerequisite to the attainment of that virtue, practice some type of mortification and denial. By practicing that denial he can acquire that particular moral virtue toward which he is striving. When a man places these final acts which by force of all the similar acts which have preceded them change a disposition into a habit and produce a moral virtue, those acts also generate the virtue of prudence. But prudence is not generated unless it brings together with itself all the other moral virtues which, together with synderesis, constitute the principles of prudence. Thus, those acts of mortification performed with the precise purpose of acquiring or increasing one particular moral virtue indirectly work toward the acquiring and the increasing of the other moral virtues as well. In this way with each act of mortification by which a moral virtue is increased, the power of the will is strengthened.

In this way we explain how denial in licit things strengthens the will so that when illicit desires press in upon the soul, the will can refuse to accede to these desires. This is a psychologically sound procedure, if denial and mortification are used correctly, if they are used to develop and to strengthen virtues in the soul. Each act of denial, if prudent and therefore according to right reason, will aid and contribute to the

strengthening and growth of some virtue in the soul. With the strengthening and growth of one virtue, there is a proportionate growth and strengthening of all moral virtues because of their connection through prudence. Thus each act of denial and mortification, performed according to right reason, strengthens the will. It strengthens some particular virtue and consequently all the virtues. This is merely another and perhaps more accurate way of saying that the will is strengthened to face future combats. In this way it is psychologically correct to advocate the practice of mortification as a means of preparing for future combat.

Conclusion.

In this paper we have established the role of mortification, particularly in the attainment of moral virtue. Mortification gives the denial and control which are necessary elements in the development and growth of moral virtue. It is a prerequisite and a concomitant of every moral virtue, a general condition of soul found in all virtues, a necessary condition of virtue. With this fundamental point established we offer solutions to three problems:

1. The purpose of inflicting pain upon the senses.

Pain is inflicted upon the senses to acquire greater control over the sense appetite. Reason acquires control over the concupiscent appetite by restraining and checking the passions of love and concupiscence and delight as they tend toward and take pleasure in an object pleasing to them. It likewise strengthens its control by restraining and checking the movements of the passions of hate and aversion and checking the movements of the passions of hate and aversion and sorrow as they tend away and flee from an unpleasant object and register their distaste at its presence. Reason, by resisting the movements of passion away from a painful object strengthens its control over the sense appetite.

2. Is mortification dangerous?

Because mortification is an absolute requisite for reaching a high degree of moral perfection, writers place great stress upon

it. There is a tendency to make it a virtue in itself. It is not that. It is rather in the line of an instrument or a tool used to develop a virtue. It is a very effective tool. But because it is so effective it must be used with great care and caution. Just as a powerful tool or instrument if used improperly can mutilate and even destroy the product being fashioned by the worker, so also with mortification. It must be used with great prudence and always with the precise purpose of developing a particular virtue. Acts of mortification directed toward developing a particular virtue become, as part of that virtue, a sort of second nature. As the particular virtue increases, the acts of that virtue become more intense. The denial inherent in these acts becomes likewise more intense. But all of this as a gradual steady growth. After years of striving toward spiritual perfection, a man can place really intense acts of virtue without great strain or difficulty. Such acts, if placed at the beginning of his striving for spiritual excellence, would have been imprudent and psychologically dangerous. They would have involved denial too great and too onerous for a nature unaccustomed to denial. But practiced as part of a highly developed virtue they are acts to which this particular nature has been gradually accustomed and are acts placed under the direction of prudence. As such they are not psychologically dangerous.

3. How does mortification strengthen the will for future combats?

Mortification is a concomitant part of each moral virtue. Each act of mortification and denial, if prudent and according to right reason, will aid and contribute to the strengthening and growth of some virtue in the soul. With the growth and strengthening of one virtue there is a proportionate growth and strengthening of all the moral virtues because of their connection through prudence. In this way mortification increases virtue and strengthens the will for future combats.

RICHARD M. HOFFMANN, C. SS. R.

*Redemptorist Fathers,
Oconomowoc, Wisconsin.*